

Carter Warns of Dangers in Rejecting SALT

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President Carter said today that failure to ratify a strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union could lead to "a dark nightmare of unrestrained competition."

The warning came in the president's long-awaited major defense of the SALT II treaty, which is now virtually complete after years of negotiation.

"A rejection of SALT II would have significance beyond the fate of a single treaty," Carter said in remarks prepared for delivery to the American Newspaper Publishers Association meeting in New York.

It would mean a radical turning away from America's long-term policy of seeking world peace, the control of nuclear weapons and the easing of tensions between Americans and the Soviet people under a system of international law based on mutual interests, he said.

ALTHOUGH THE TREATY has not yet been formally signed and submitted, the Senate debate on SALT ratification is well under way. Stiff opposition has already taken shape, with many observers predicting that the treaty in its present form might well fall short of the needed two-thirds approval.

Carter's speech attempted to steer critics away from the notion that rejection or significant amendment by the Senate could be used to force renegotiation on more favorable terms.

"The fact is that the alternative to this treaty is not a perfect agreement drafted unilaterally by the United States in which we gain everything and the Soviets gain nothing," Carter

said. "The alternative, now and in the foreseeable future, is no agreement at all."

White House aides say Carter hoped with today's speech to shape the SALT debate around four major themes: the need to continue the arms control process, the place of SALT in the overall defense posture of the United States, the ability of the United States to detect any Soviet cheating, and the extent to which SALT could be linked to other areas of U.S.-Soviet relations.

"This new arms control agreement will obviously serve our national interests," Carter said. "It will reduce the dangerous levels of strategic arms and restrain the development of future weapons. It will help to maintain our relative strength compared to the Soviets and will avert a costly, risky and pointless buildup of missile launchers and bombers — at the end of which both sides would be even less secure."

CARTER, adopting some of the language of critics who want more defense spending, said the upward trend of Soviet military capability makes new U.S. strategic weapons necessary, even with SALT II.

"We must modernize our own strategic forces. . . . The defense budget I have submitted will ensure that our nuclear force continues to be essentially equivalent to that of the Soviet Union," Carter said.

The question of whether the United States can verify Soviet compliance with SALT II has become one of the most pressing questions in the Senate debate. Early concern about Soviet concealment practices has been deepened by new worries following the

loss of CIA monitoring stations on the Soviet border in Iran.

"Our photographic satellites and other systems enable us to follow technological developments in Soviet strategic forces with great accuracy," Carter insisted.

But instead of offering details, he asked for trust. "The sensitive intelligence techniques cannot be disclosed in public, but the bottom line is that if there is an effort to cheat on the SALT agreement . . . we will detect it and we will do so in time fully to protect our security," he said.

Carter, already distressed about leaks on the verification issue, warned that "leaders in Congress must ensure that these secrets will be guarded" when they are revealed behind closed doors.

THE PRESIDENT was equally explicit in arguing against any congressional attempt to make SALT contingent on Soviet good behavior elsewhere — the so-called "linkage" issue — saying it would make no sense to add nuclear instability to other troubled areas.

In any event, he went on, there is no carrot-and-stick situation.

"SALT II is not a favor we are doing for the Soviet Union," he said. "It is an agreement carefully negotiated in the national security interest of the United States."

The SALT II treaty would limit both sides to no more than 2,250 bombers and missiles. Within that total, sub-limits would be placed on types of weapons, most notably intercontinental ballistic missiles which carry multiple, independently targeted hydrogen bombs.

The number of warheads on each missile would be limited and each side would be restricted to introducing only one significantly new type of missile during the life of the treaty.

Conservative critics of SALT say the treaty is one-sided in favor of the Russians and sets limits too high to be meaningful. From the left there is criticism that the treaty not only fails to halt the arms race but actually requires a new generation of U.S. strategic weaponry.

The administration makes essentially the same argument in response to both: The present treaty is imperfect but it is the best available now and accepting it is better than aborting the arms control process.

"Without SALT, the world would be forced to conclude that America had chosen confrontation rather than cooperation and peace," Carter said.